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Memorial site could enjoy federal status

By DOUGLAS CRIST Staff Writer

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The National Park Service will discuss options at two public meetings Tuesday.

Bainbridge Island's Japanese American internment memorial could soon enjoy significant status and funding under the National Park System.

Designation as a "satellite unit" of Minidoka Internment National Monument in southern Idaho – where many island internees spent World War II after their transfer from a camp at Manzanar, Calif. – is among the alternatives discussed in a just-released study by the NPS. The proposal will be presented at a pair of public meetings this coming Tuesday at City Hall.

"I think these are the alternatives that we could have realistically expected," said Clarence Moriwaki of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community. "Let's not forget, the National Park Service has existing funding issues for some of the crown jewels of the system — Olympic National Park, Mount Rainier. Thinking we could create a whole new (monument) unit when some of these crown jewels are woefully behind wasn't a realistic objective."

The NPS study was authorized by an act of Congress in 2002, to consider the historical significance of the planned memorial – to be built on eight acres on the south side of Eagle Harbor, east of Taylor Avneue – for inclusion in the national park system.

On March 30, 1942, 227 Japanese American island residents departed from a ferry landing there, bound for wartime internment camps. Both the Manzanar, and Minidoka camps have been designated as historically significant sites and are managed by the NPS.

In part because the Eagledale ferry landing no longer exists, the Bainbridge site did not qualify for "monument" status. But the study did determine that by linking the memorial site to an existing NPS facility, the story of the wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans "can be told in a larger historical context." Under one scenario, the NPS would contribute \$300,000 toward development of an interpretive center, then leave facility management to the local community.

A more ambitious option would designate the memorial as a "satellite unit" of the Minidoka memorial in Idaho. The site would be eligible for federal development funding of up to \$1.1 million, and receive as much as \$200,000 per year for operations.



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The NPS could provide staffing to assist visitors and manage the site, supplementing local efforts.

After a public comment period ending June 1, the recommendations will be finalized and submitted to Congress for consideration.

The first phase of memorial development should get under way soon, with parking areas, trails and a boardwalk planned.

The second phase, including the "story wall" and partial reconstruction of the ferry landing to commemorate the internees' departure, would follow as more funds are raised.

"It's been beautiful signs and ideas (so far)," Moriwaki said. "Once people see (work) crews going in, then the excitement really starts."

* * * * *

Memorial meetings

The National Park Service will host meetings to discuss the internment memorial from 2-4 p.m. and 7-9 p.m. May 17 in the council chambers at City Hall.

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